Alignment Artifacts on Right-Edge Double-Print Positions of the 1956 Topps A1 Gray-Back Sheet

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Abstract

This preprint documents the first recorded identification of recurring red alignment dash/tick artifacts on right-edge double-print positions of the 1956 Topps first-run gray-back A1 production sheet. These artifacts are absent from corresponding left-edge sheet positions and from SP (single-print) subjects. Approximately 150 gray-back Mayo Smith specimens were examined with zero alignments observed, supporting a cutter-creep masking interpretation rather than universal presence. As of January 2026, no auction catalogs, grading standards, specialist checklists, collector forums, hobby literature, or print-history references document this phenomenon.

1. Background

Topps printed the 1956 baseball issue on 110-subject sheets. The earliest production, known to collectors as the 'gray-back' run, is attributed to Plate A1. Sheet composition included both SP (single-print) and DP (double-print) subjects, with DP subjects appearing twice per sheet and SP subjects once. This structural distinction is relevant for population analysis, provenance, and print-engineering inference.

2. Methods

Observations were derived from gray-back specimens sourced from private holdings and online listings during January 2026. DP subjects along the right edge of the A1 sheet were compared against corresponding left-edge and SP subjects. Negative replication testing was conducted using approximately 150 gray-back Mayo Smith specimens, none of which exhibited alignment artifacts. Comparative analysis leveraged known sheet reconstructions and visual alignment between card borders and presumed cutter-side rails.

3. Observations

Alignment artifacts appear as short horizontal red dashes or ticks located at the right border of right-edge DP subjects. Positive specimens include Jackie Robinson and Ernie Banks, among others in the DP right-edge column. These artifacts do not appear on left-edge subjects or SP subjects and are not documented in existing hobby literature.

4. Negative Replication

A negative control was established via population sampling of approximately 150 gray-back Mayo Smith specimens. Zero exhibited alignment artifacts. Many demonstrated thin right borders consistent with cutter creep toward the side-lay rail, resulting in potential masking of bleed-zone artifacts.

5. DP Column Reconstruction

The rightmost DP column of the A1 gray-back sheet is reconstructed as follows (top to bottom): Ernie Banks, Ken Boyer, Ruben Gomez, Roy Sievers, Ray Jablonski, Jackie Robinson, Joe Collins, Gus Triandos, Gene Freese, and Mayo Smith.

6. Interpretation

Presence of alignment artifacts exclusively on right-edge DP subjects supports an interpretation involving bleed-zone printing and cutter-side registration. Cutter creep toward the rail likely reduces visible artifact presence on lower DP subjects by trimming into the bleed zone. This reconciles positive findings in higher DP positions with absence in lower positions without contradicting columnar alignment behavior.

7. Classification Rule

Presence of alignment artifacts is conclusive for DP origin. Absence is non-diagnostic. This asymmetric classifier aligns with print-engineering constraints and observed negative replication data.

8. Priority and Literature Absence

A review of hobby literature, grading standards, specialist checklists, auction catalogs, collector forums, and print-history references yields no prior documentation of this phenomenon as of January 2026. No third-party grading company recognizes the feature, no auction description refers to it, and no catalog indexes or slab modifiers note it. This preprint constitutes the first documented identification and reconstruction of this alignment artifact and its print-engineering interpretation.

9. Provenance

Relevant gray-back specimens analyzed herein originate from the Kaufman Collection. Cards were pack-pulled in 1956 in Marion, South Dakota and retained within the same family collection across generations.

10. Conclusion

Alignment artifacts on right-edge DP positions of the 1956 Topps A1 gray-back sheet provide new evidence for sheet architecture, print mechanics, and provenance classification. This discovery enables position-based attribution and establishes a reproducible diagnostic rule for DP origin in gray-back specimens.

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